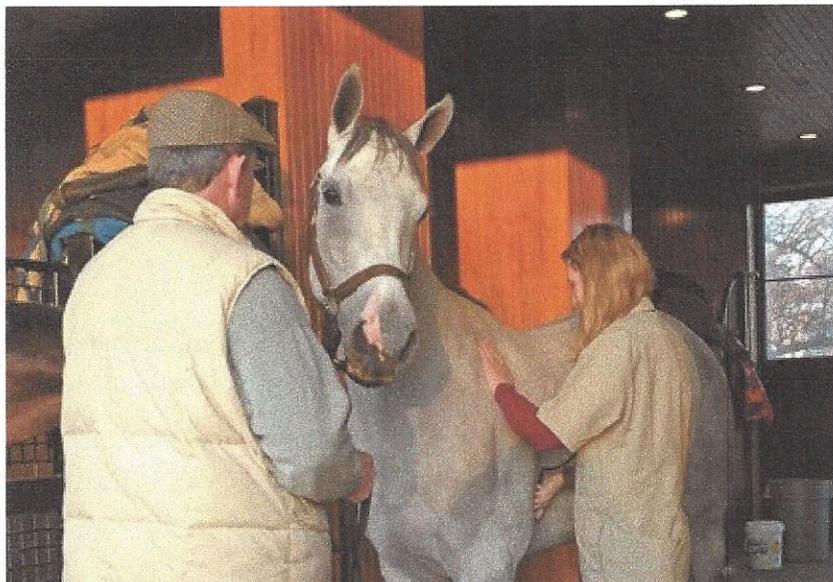


Commentary

# Why a Veterinarian Never Stops Learning

By [Todd Behre, DVM, PMP](#) | Feb 5, 2016 | [1 Comment](#) | Topics: [Veterinary Practice](#), [Horse Industry News](#)



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Photo: Anne M. Eberhardt/The Horse

What does your veterinarian have in common with every other practicing veterinarian in your state? He or she once passed an exam to become licensed, and every year since then, has completed a specified amount of training to remain current on trends, best procedures, and new developments in the field that impact their patients.

This might sound like a lot of hoops to jump through after nearly a decade of specialized schooling, but the requirements exist for good reason: protecting the public. This has always been veterinary licensing boards' primary purpose, and they do it by ensuring that veterinarians provide competent care to their patients. Boards have long required that

veterinarians engage in continuing education to ensure this competency. Along with providing patient care, veterinarians actively work to prevent the spread of diseases, making them a critical link in not only animal health management but also human health management.

Veterinarians recognize that many animal diseases are zoonotic—meaning they can be transmitted between animals and people--and that disease agents could be present in animals that might or might not appear “sick.” This makes veterinarians crucial in communities’ **“One Health”** team efforts, bridging clients’ health care teams when physicians might not be familiar with the presence and impact of some zoonotic diseases. This is especially important when the clinical signs a disease causes in sick animals are totally unlike those the symptoms it causes in humans.

Further complicating the threats of animal-to-animal and animal-to-human disease spread is ever-increasing transport of animals. Movement of horses within and between states and countries is overseen by myriad local, state, federal, and international regulations. Veterinarians are their clients’ first resource to ensure their horses are free of disease and adequately prepared to legally and expediently travel when necessary.

After graduating and becoming licensed, most veterinarians seek accreditation through USDA's National Veterinary Accreditation Program (NVAP). The program gives accredited veterinarians opportunities to assist the USDA in carrying out programs designed to safeguard both public and animal health.

Only accredited veterinarians can perform testing for government-regulated diseases, such as brucellosis, tuberculosis, and equine infectious anemia and, in most cases, only NVAP-accredited veterinarians can prepare certificates of veterinary inspection (or “health papers”) so animals can move across state or international borders. Like veterinary licensing boards, the NVAP (1) requires “Initial Accreditation Training” (IAT) for licensed veterinarians to become accredited and (2) offers an ever-expanding suite of training modules for licensed/accredited veterinarians to renew their accreditation every three years.

The IAT is a web-based curriculum comprised of Veterinary Accreditation Lessons, Emerging and Exotic Diseases of Animals Lessons, and Transboundary Disease Incursions. A veterinarian must earn a score of 80% on each of the quizzes is required to

pass. On average, the IAT takes 10 hours to complete. Since becoming required for accreditation in 2011, veterinarians have completed more than 20,000 IAT courses—that translates into approximately 210,000 hours or 8,750 days or 24 years of IAT training!

Training modules for accreditation renewal ensure that veterinarians remain vigilant of existing and emerging disease threats to all species, including horses. The NVAP offers procedural, disease, welfare, and traceability modules that include horses and those that are not equine-specific.

**The NVAP's online training site** is available to the horse-owning public with no user name or password required. Accredited veterinarians complete 300 to more than 800 modules every day on the site, making it one of the most used educational resources for veterinarians in the world.

In addition to web-based training, NVAP presents this same suite of modules in classroom settings at veterinary conventions of all sizes throughout the year. These opportunities afford much more personal interaction between accredited veterinarians and the USDA Veterinary Medical Officers who rely on them to help administer animal health programs. A listing of upcoming face-to-face training opportunities is also available at the **NVAP website**.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



### Todd Behre, DVM, PMP

Todd Behre, DVM, PMP, has been the coordinator for USDA's National Veterinary Accreditation Program since 2007. Prior to that, he coordinated USDA's Horse Protection Program, which enforces the Horse Protection Act. An equine practitioner for nearly 29 years, his practice has been limited to part-time horse dentistry since beginning his career at the USDA in 2002. Behre lives with his wife Cookie and six dogs in the Catskills Region of New York state.